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## **Energy commission holds meeting on Kinder Morgan pipeline in Nashua**

By DAVID BROOKS

*Staff Writer*

To nobody's surprise, the huge ballroom at the Nashua Radisson was crowded with people Wednesday night when the federal government came to town to hear what the area think about a proposed natural gas pipeline through the region.

Also to nobody's surprise, the crowd didn't think much of the pipeline, nor the process by which it was being analyzed.

"FERC's rushing to the scoping meetings ... has made the process less transparent and disadvantaged interested parties like Merrimack," said Nancy Harrington, chair of the Merrimack Town Council, with four other councilors behind her.

Like many speakers, Harrington doubted that the gas would help New Hampshire, arguing that it was largely designed for export.

She also expressed dismay that Kinder Morgan had filed its latest 6,000-plus-page plan only on Friday, leaving little time for analysis. She urged more meetings be held after the town had at least 90 days to review the documents, a request seconded by the chairman of the Nashua Regional Planning Commission.

Mason Selectman Louise Lavoie had a further concern relating to the recent Kinder-Morgan filing: "FERC's website traffic has been overloaded, resulting in limited access to the documents. Slow down this process."

The meeting was known as a scoping hearing, held by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the most important regulatory body for gas pipelines.

It started at 6:30 p.m. and was still underway as The Telegraph went to press, looking likely to run well after midnight.

While most speakers opposed the pipeline, a few supported the idea, both for the gas it will carry and the economic benefits.

"It presents the promise of good, family-supporting jobs for this region," said Oberluck Lee, one of roughly 20 members of the Labor International Union at the meeting to support the project. The LIU has New Hampshire chapters in Manchester and Portsmouth.

Many speakers who favored the pipeline were met with groans, boos and cries of "Where do you live?" – leading Eric Tomasi, a project manager for FERC who ran the meeting, to

admonish the crowd.

People who signed up were given three minutes each to talk – first came more than a dozen elected officials, then more than 70 area residents. The comments, and those from future hearings including one at 6:30 p.m. Thursday in Milford Town Hall, will be collected and used as FERC makes its decision about whether to allow the pipeline and where it should go.

Kinder Morgan, parent company of Tennessee Gas Pipeline Co., recently said the diameter of the proposed line would be 30 inches, compared to earlier estimates of 3 feet, and trimmed the power of compressor stations needed to move gas through the pipeline – including one proposed in New Ipswich.

The pipeline would carry up to 1.3 billion cubic feet of gas, according to the July 24 filing. That figure is lower than earlier estimates of 2.2 billion, which may reflect some apparent problems getting power plants to sign up as long-term gas customers.

Kinder Morgan calls the project Northeast Energy Direct.

If the five FERC commissions approve a project, it conveys the ability to have eminent domain.

"This project might set a record for the most amount of comments ever received," Tomasi said, noting that more than 3,000 comments had been emailed or mailed to FERC already.

A major component of comments, Tomasi said, was a preference for alternative energy over gas, as well as concern about its effect on residential areas, disruption of rural character, and potential danger to aquifers.

The crowd's attitude was obvious even as they filed in, 90 minutes before the meeting began. "No pipeline" buttons and banners and T-shirts were standard dress, and several vehicles in the parking lot carried big anti-pipeline signs. Many people even carried fans printed with "FERC do your job" – which proved useful, as the crowd's size gave the air-conditioning a run for its money.

"Has everybody signed the petition for the governor?" asked one woman, circling through the crowd with a clipboard in hand.

Texas-based Kinder Morgan wants to bury the pipeline from Wright, N.Y., running east through 64 miles of Massachusetts and 71 miles in New Hampshire, before connecting with existing pipelines in Dracut, Mass. Most of the route would be under or next to existing power lines, although often requiring that the right-of-way to be widened onto neighboring property. At times, it would go leave the power corridor, such as a detour around Souhegan High School.

Kinder Morgan has not yet filed an official application asking to build the pipeline, which means there is not yet an official route. Tomasi said the company expects to file in October, or possibly later.

The pipeline would not go into operation until 2018 at the earliest.

The entire project, including pipelines as far south as Pennsylvania and some side routes, including one through Mason, would cover 418 miles. It would include nine new compressor stations, including the one in New Ipswich, and 13 new meter stations.

Locally, the proposed route passes through the Souhegan Valley, Merrimack, Litchfield, Pelham and Windham, tunnelling underneath rivers including the Souhegan and Merrimack along the way.

The pipeline is designed to carry natural gas from shale fields in Pennsylvania and New York state into New England. Proponents say the gas is needed to help New England meet a wintertime electricity crunch, when gas-fired power plants compete with gas supplies for heating.

There have been many public hearings since the pipeline was proposed at the start of the year, but this was the first involving the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Typical of opponents was Donald Johnson, of Windham, whose home adjoins a electric power line where the pipeline may run. He said he was opposed to the whole idea of more natural gas because of concerns about fracking, and didn't like the location through New Hampshire in particular.

"They were going to go through Massachusetts, but Mass. said no, so they said, 'We'll go through Cow Hampshire. We'll go up and then go back down,'" he said.

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